

Incorporating Panchakarma in Routine Life as Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Strategy: A Review

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ABSTRACT

The demanding nature of the contemporary lifestyle often results in improper dietary habits and heightened stress levels, contributing to the accumulation of toxins within the body and increasing susceptibility to various diseases. Ayurveda views health as a state of equilibrium among bodily elements, senses, and the mind. To restore this balance, *Panchakarma*, encompassing five purificatory therapies (*Vamana*, *Virechana*, *Niruha Vasti*, *Nasya*, and *Raktamokshan*), is employed to eliminate vitiated doshas and metabolic waste products. The efficacy of these primary procedures is enhanced by preparatory regimens (*Snehana* and *Svedana*) that mobilize toxins, and post-therapy dietary management (*Samsarjana Krama*) that aids in restoring metabolic function. Integrating *Panchakarma* principles into daily and seasonal routines (*Dinacharya* and *Ritucharya*) is emphasized for its role in proactive health maintenance and disease prevention. Moreover, this review explores the potential of *Panchakarma* in bolstering immunity and re-establishing bodily homeostasis, suggesting its relevance in managing emerging diseases and large-scale health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, in accordance with fundamental Ayurvedic principles for addressing widespread imbalances. Ultimately, this article underscores the significant role of *Panchakarma* in promoting overall well-being, preventing illness, and offering potential strategies to mitigate the impact of contemporary health challenges.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary new-fashioned lifestyle of hustle and bustle leading to improper dietary habits and unhealthy stressful daily routine is primarily responsible for accumulation of toxins in the body and serves as an etiology for various diseases. This process of toxin accumulation and manifestation of disease due to unhealthy lifestyle can either be due to exogenous etiological factors (*Agantuja hetu*) such as exposure to foreign microbes through food, water and air or, it can be endogenously (*nija hetu*)¹ generated in the body due to *Rutu* (seasonal variations), *Aahar* (dietary habits), *Vihar* (lifestyle), *Jara* (old age), etc. Health has been described as the equilibrium of *dosha*, *dhatu*, *agni* and *mala kriya* along with the pleasant soul, senses and manas.² In order to pacify the aggravated doshas and establish health, *aushadha* (SAT-I.7 - medicaments & therapies) in Ayurveda have been briefly categorized into two – *Shodhan* (purificatory

therapies) and *Shaman* (palliative therapies)³. Here, *Shodhan* includes panchakarma or five purificatory procedures that are *vaman* (SAT-I.139), *virechan* (SAT-I.139), *niruha vasti* (SAT-I.145), *nasya* (SAT-I.156) and *raktamokshan* (SAT-I.413) which leads to removal of vitiated *doshas* and *mala* from the body⁴. Panchakarma therapy results in the purification of biological system from gross channels up to the molecular levels rendering it suitable for self-recovery by rejuvenation and revitalization of all body tissues and potentiating better therapeutic responsiveness. Apart from this, Panchakarma therapies, are independently advocated for improvement of *bala* (immunity) and as preparatory procedures for improving immunomodulation property of *rasayana* (Rejuvenation) medicines⁵. In Ayurveda, *Swasthavritta* is the subject that deals with health promotion and disease prevention wherein, *Panchakarma* has been elaboratively described as a part of *dincharya* (daily regimen) and *ritucharya* (seasonal regimen).

Therefore, importance of *Panchakarma* in preventive and social medicine has widespread benefits ranging from primary prevention modalities of health promotion and disease prevention through incorporation in *dincharya* and *ritucharya* to the contribution in secondary prevention if given in early stages of diseases leading to better prognosis. *Panchakarma* is also helpful in planning tertiary prevention strategies for incurable diseases leading to better outcomes in various skin disorders, cancer, etc. along with the palliative care and improved quality of life in geriatrics, paralysis patients, etc.

MECHANISM OF ACTION OF PANCHAKARMA

1. *Vamana* is elimination of doshas by vomiting preferably for imbalance in *Kapha dosha*.
2. *Virechan* is elimination of *doshas* by purgation preferred for *Pitta dosha* imbalance.
3. *Vasti* is performed by administration of medications and their elimination through anorectal route suitable for imbalance of *Vata dosha*.
4. *Nasya* refers to administration of medicines through nostrils intended for *shodhan* of head and neck region.
5. *Raktamokshan* includes various blood-letting procedures for elimination of *tridosha*.

Prior to the main Panchakarma procedures like *vamana*, *virechana*, etc., *poorvakarma* or preparatory procedures like *deepan-pachan* (enhancement of metabolism), *snehana* (oleation) and *svedana* (sudation) are administered in order to mobilize the *dosha* from *shakha* (different parts of the body) to *koshtha* (main site of *pitta* or *kapha dosha*) from where the *doshas* can be easily eliminated⁶. Apart from this, Panchakarma procedures are followed by *sansarjan krama* or post therapy dietary regimen for restoration of *agni* (digestive and metabolic fires)⁷.

DISTINCTIVE ACTION OF SNEHANA AND SVEDANA IN DETOXIFICATION

Considering modern human physiology, these pre and post therapeutic regimens also individually contribute to detoxification, healing and rejuvenation of body cells and organ systems. Body expels out unwanted substances by either carrying them to liver (fat soluble substances & toxic substances) or to kidneys (water soluble substances).

Snehapana (internal administration of fats), mobilizes absorbed fat and carries the unwanted substances to liver so that they can be metabolized or eliminated, provided the functioning of liver is within normal limits. The toxic substances as well as the substances which are not catabolized are excreted through bile.⁸ The secretion of bile into duodenum is in turn dependent upon the amount of fat reaching the duodenum.⁹ So, by administering huge amount of lipids in a cumulative way, apart from mobilizing the waste products,

we can induce more and more secretion of bile into duodenum, which also means more and more toxins and waste products in the body come into duodenum that can be eliminated out.¹⁰ This whole process is well assisted by the application of *svedana*.

Since water is the main content of sweat, most of the water-soluble waste products can be eliminated through *swedana*.¹¹ *Svedana* induces sweating by the application of heat which is achieved by cutaneous vasodilatation¹². Since it is an induced one, when the stimulus i.e., the heating is withdrawn, body tries to keep the thermal homeostasis by causing cutaneous vasoconstriction¹³. The net effect is an increase in the blood flow to the internal organs particularly to the GIT. Thus, *svedana*, when coupled with *snehana*, serves to carry the unwanted substances (which are not otherwise removed) to the GIT in the form of many secretions. So, apart from causing the excretion of some substances through the skin, *svedana* also causes many unwanted materials to secrete into the GIT, with the intention that they can be eliminated out by the main *shodhana* procedures¹⁴.

ROLE OF SAM SARJANA KRAMA

The *samsarjana krama* is given with two aims –

- to give time to stomach/intestine to replenish Agni during the *samshodhana* procedures and
- to slowly increase the acidic and alkaline secretions in the stomach and intestine.

Sudden increase in acidic/alkaline damages the mucosa leading to gastritis and ulcers¹⁵. The sequence followed is *Peya- Vilepi- Akrita Yusha- Krita Yusha- Akrita Mamsarasa- Krita Mamsarasa*¹⁶. *Peya*, being *Laghu, Grahi, Dhatuposhaka, Dipana* and *Vatanulomana*,¹⁷ is administered first to meet the initial requirement of a substance that is easily digestible and provides instant energy. Use of oily food in the beginning may cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever etc. because of improper digestion. Therefore, starch through *manda* is given first followed by carbohydrate rich diet like *Peya* and *vilepi*, also rich in fibres to ensure easy digestion. Protein rich *yusha* and finally fats are given later in the form of *mamsa rasa* followed by routine normal diet. This transition from simple to complex food is advised as *samsarjana krama* to avoid any complication from the *samshodhan* process and avail its maximum benefits in the form of increased metabolism, strength and immunity.

INCORPORATING PANCHAKARMA IN DINCHARYA

- *Nasya* - It has been advised daily with *anu taila* for prevention of disorders of head and neck, ageing and greying of hairs. This procedure also benefits with pleasant face, clear and soft speech and provides strength and nourishment to all sense organs¹⁸. It can be administered in morning in *kapha dosha* predominance conditions, at noon in *pittaja* and at evening in *vataja* conditions¹⁹.
- *Sarvanga Abhyanga* - Oiling imparts strength and stability to the body, good tactile sensations, lustre to the skin, delays ageing, cures tiredness, prevention from *vata dosha* disorders and imparts good sleep²⁰.
- *Udgharshana & udsadana* - *Udgharshana* is rubbing of powdered herbs without oil onto skin and *udsadana* refers to massage with herbal pastes along with oil. *Udgharshana* dilates blood vessels and enhances the *agni* in skin. *Udsadana* enhances the complexion, gives pleasure, cleanliness, imparts auspiciousness and feeling of lightness²¹.
- *Karna Purana* - Acharya Yogaratnakara, classifies panchakarma as *vamana, virechana, nasya, karnapoorana* and *rakta mokshana*. *Karna Puran* is administration of *sneha dravya* or oil into the

ears. It provides prevention from ear disorders, earache due to *vata dosha*, stiffness of neck and jaw, difficulty in hearing and deafness²².

RITU-SHODHAN

Ritucharya or seasonal regimen has been advised in Ayurveda in order to avoid diseases arising from *chaya* (accumulation) and *prakopa* (aggravation) of *dosha* according to seasons. *Ritu shodhana* is a part of *Ritucharya*, whereas different *shodhana* regimens are advised according to six different seasons as per the dosha predominance resulting in that season which is as follows²³–

SEASON	DOSHA PRAKOP	ADVISED SHODHAN METHOD
Vasant	Kapha	Vamana
Pravrut	Vata	Niruha Vasti
Sharad	Pitta	Virechan, Raktamokshan

Shodhana improves *Kayagni*, cures the disorders, maintains the equilibrium of the dosha, improves function of sense organs, mind and complexion. It also improves the vigor and vitality and enables the person to live a long and healthy life²⁴. Hence, *Ritu shodhana* is followed irrespective of *Swastha* (healthy) or *Atura* (diseased) state, for prevention of disease as well as promotion of health.

ROLE OF PANCHKARMA IN MANAGING EPIDEMIC SITUATIONS LIKE COVID 19

In Ayurveda, *Janpadodhwamsa* (epidemic) has been described in detail, wherein, *panchkarma* has been advised as the first line of treatment followed by use of *rasayana* drugs²⁵. Impurities or perversion in *vayu* (air), *jala* (water), *desh* (region) and *kala* (seasons) have been described as the four typical contributors in origin of epidemics²⁶. These mutilated factors cause prominent and widespread *dosha* imbalance which can only be corrected through *shodhana*. Detoxification of entire body, including *Koshtha* and *Srotas*, through panchakarma ensures enhanced *Agni Vyapara* (Metabolism), cure of pre-existing diseases, establishment of body homeostasis and ultimately improved immunity rendering the body ready for *Rasayana* (Rejuvenation) medicines which further lead to immunomodulation.

As far as modern pathophysiology is concerned, in situations of epidemics or emergence of new diseases like covid 19, our strong innate immunity is the best way to safeguard oneself. and primarily important to collectively cope up with such situations in a better way socially and economically. *Bala nash* (immuno-compromised state) is mentioned as a symptom of *Bahudoshavastha* in which Panchakarma therapy are especially indicated²⁷. *Vasti* in the form of *Brimhana vasti*, *Chakshushya vasti*, *rasayana vasti*, *yapana vasti* etc. is administered with drugs like *amalaka*, *madhu*, *sarpi* etc. which are significant source of proteins, vitamins and minerals that has long lasting nutritive and health promotive impact. Human body that is devoid of alimentary toxins, metabolic waste products, auto immune complexes, allergens, etc. through *shodhana* procedures definitely stands a better chance in coping with epidemic situations.

DISCUSSION

Population growth, migration from rural areas to cities, international air travel, poverty, wars, and destructive ecological changes due to economic development and land use are the factors responsible for emergence of new disease, which has become a more frequent phenomenon over the past few decades. Along with all the preventive measures that could help us cope with these health emergencies, strengthening the natural immunity is of vital importance and *shodhana* therapies described in Ayurveda,

undoubtedly have huge potential in this regard. The *doshas* which are mitigated by *langhana* and *pachana* therapies sometimes get aggravated again, but those which are eliminated by *Shodhana* never get aggravated again, that is why *Panchakarma* or *sodhana* has been described as *apunarbhavachikitsa*²⁸. *Shodhana* through *Panchakarma* results in increased digestive power, mitigation of diseases, homeostasis in body, pleasant senses, mind, intellect and complexion, increase in strength, nourishment and virilism, delayed ageing and long life free from ailments²⁴. It targets not just physical health but also leads to attainment of mental, emotional and spiritual well-being, resulting in overall holistic health of the individual and rendering the person with strength and immune system that can more efficiently cope up with even the pandemics like covid 19.

CONCLUSION

Each *shodhana* therapeutic procedures has its own beneficial impact on health promotion and disease prevention. Just like immunization campaigns or vitamin prophylaxis programs organized in primary public health centres, organizations of seasonal panchakarma camps in public health centres will prove beneficial for community in preservation of health and prevention of both seasonal epidemic diseases and rare pandemic situations. Not just this, these can be easily incorporated in our day-to-day routine or *dinacharya* and seasonal regimen or *ritucharya* in order to maintain health with utmost vitality and vigor and therefore be better prepared in situations of epidemic, pandemic or emergence of new diseases. It is the responsibility of every individual to be vigilant about one's duty towards his or her own body as an officer in charge of a city preserves the city and a charioteer in maintenance of his chariot.

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